

This week in history: September 1-7

This column profiles important historical events which took place during this week, 25 years ago, 50 years ago, 75 years ago and 100 years ago

31 August 2025

25 years ago: Philadelphia teachers demand strike action

On Sept 5, 2000, Philadelphia teachers decided to strike. Around 15,000 out of 21,000 school employees, organized under the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), attended the packed standing-room-only meeting room to authorize the strike, expressing the desire to wage a struggle against the school district and provide high-quality education for students in the city.

Philadelphia public schools employees had struck five times since winning collective bargaining rights in 1965. In 1972-73, during the administration of Democratic Mayor Frank Rizzo, the union leadership was jailed for violating a back-to-work order after a total of six weeks on strike.

With a projected \$80 million budget deficit, the school board decided to butcher the living standards of teachers to make up for declining funding from state and federal governments. Pay raises would have been tied to principal evaluations rather than years of service, and school officials would have been given the authority to deny voluntary transfers to another class, grade or school. School hours were expected to increase an hour and 15 minutes and 5 additional school days were to be added to the school calendar without more pay. Healthcare costs were expected to rise significantly. Proposed raises were insulting, with no increase in pay the first year or fifth year of the contract.

As the budget deficit grew, the attacks on both teachers and the quality standards of education deepened. Teaching vacancies became widespread, along with ballooning class sizes. Over 50 percent of students scored in the lowest quarter on state tests in Philadelphia public schools. Using this manufactured pretext, both capitalist parties targeted public school teachers. Passed under Republican Governor Tom Ridge, Act 46 permitted the state to take over public schools because of poor performances or labor disputes.

The PFT bureaucracy, led by Ted Kirsch, was the biggest obstacle for teachers. For the first time in the union's history, the bureaucracy mandated teachers to report to the first day of class without a contract, depriving rank-and-file members of the powerful strike weapon they had overwhelmingly voted on. The PFT instead prioritized a strategy of fundraising for Democratic

politicians "friendly" to union interests—that is, to the bureaucracy. This bankrupt strategy of supporting the Democratic Party was apparent on Labor Day. Presidential candidate Al Gore traveled to Philadelphia and refused to back the strike vote by 15,000 teachers.

50 years ago: Egypt and Israel sign Sinai Agreement

On September 4, 1975, Egyptian and Israeli officials signed the Sinai Interim Agreement in Geneva, Switzerland. The agreement was the second major treaty signed between the two countries since the end of the Yom Kippur War.

The terms of the deal required Israel to withdraw from the Gidi and Mitla passes and the Abu Rudeis oil fields in the Sinai Peninsula. In exchange, Egypt agreed to allow Israeli non-military cargo to pass through the Suez Canal.

Key provisions included the establishment of a U.S. ground presence in the Sinai peninsula to act as military observers. Steps were taken to create a diplomatic process for future disputes, but the deal stopped short of fully normalized relations.

As chief organizer of the negotiations, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger aimed to use a deal between Israel and Egypt to strategically isolate the Soviet Union in the Middle East and secure a stable flow of oil to Western economies. By providing some concessions in the Sinai in exchange for the opening of relations with Israel, the US ensured that Egypt's alliance with the Soviet Union and its Arab neighbors would break down.

Crucially, the agreement completely ignored the Palestinian people, who still lived under Israeli occupation and were engaged in an active, militant struggle. Similarly, the deal was made separately from negotiations with Syria, which had fought with Israel in the Golan Heights as part of a joint operation with Egypt during the Yom Kippur War. The war had suggested that the Arab countries, and Egypt in particular, were capable of waging a sustained military offensive against Israel with the potential to defeat the Zionist state. During the fighting, the Israeli military was only able to mount a counteroffensive after a massive military

airlift from the US.

However, the Arab nationalists like Egyptian President Anwar Sadat saw the limited success not as an opportunity to oust imperialism and Zionism from the region entirely, but merely as a bargaining chip in securing their own narrow nationalist interests and privileges in a deal with the United States. That included selling out the rights of Palestinians and abandoning ideas of Arab unity in return for control over the Suez Canal.

The Sinai agreements demonstrated the ultimate limits of bourgeois nationalist politics as a means to combat imperialism. While the 1960s and 1970s saw powerful movements of working Arab masses in anticolonial struggles, they were all subordinated to the Arab bourgeoisie and would end in one betrayal after another.

While the Yom Kippur War was initially a major setback for imperialism, the Sinai deals would result in a much stronger position of the US and Israel in the Middle East than before. Egypt had regained control of much of the Sinai and the Suez Canal, but it had all but broken off support for the Palestinians, neighboring Arab states, and its once strong relations with the Soviet Union.

75 years ago: Pusan Perimeter battle in Korea continues with Naktong offensive

On September 1, 1950, North Korean military forces began their two-week long offensive battle with United Nations forces that had formed a continuous line along the Naktong River. The Naktong offensive was itself a component of the six-week-long Battle of the Pusan Perimeter, which had begun in the early days of August and was one of the first large-scale conflicts within the early days of the Korean War, with a combined total of more than 160,000 combat troops involved.

For the first few weeks after the outbreak of the Korean War in late June, the Korean People's Army (KPA) was able to advance southwards with relative ease, overwhelming the forces of the Republic of Korea (ROK), the South Korean dictatorial regime under Syngman Rhee, and the United States. On top of weaponry and tactical advantage, the KPA also benefitted from mass defections of ROK soldiers to the northern side, reflecting the widespread unpopularity of the Rhee regime.

By August, the United Nations (UN) ground forces, composed of around 90,000 troops divided equally between the ROK and US armies, had been forced to retreat to the southeast corner of the Korean peninsula around the city of Pusan (now known as Busan). They established a 230-kilometre perimeter around Pusan along the Naktong River. From the early days of August, KPA forces unsuccessfully attempted to drive back the UN troops further from the line established along the Naktong.

On the first day of September, KPA forces began a large-scale assault on the Pusan perimeter, co-ordinating five simultaneous attacks at separate points along the perimeter. Caught by surprise initially, UN forces were nearly totally overwhelmed, at one point needing to relocate their

headquarters from Taegu to Pusan itself, further away from the front lines. An intense period of fighting followed for several days in what was one of the bloodiest battles in the entire war.

While the KPA did make certain gains and break the perimeter at several points during the course of the offensive, it concluded two weeks after it began with US-South Korea forces landing troops at Inchon and outflanking the KPA, thus forcing their retreat from the locations they were attacking along the Naktong. The Battle of Inchon that immediately followed represented a strategic turning point of the Korean War in favor of the UN forces.

100 years: War scare between Britain and Turkey over Mosul

On September 4, 1925, the League of Nations agreed to adjudicate between Britain and Turkey over the city of Mosul, now in the Republic of Iraq. The British occupied the city after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.

The British wanted to claim the Mosul region as a part of their Mandate over Iraq. Securing the oil fields, particularly the large Kirkuk field, was a primary driver of British policy. The Turks claimed the city as a part of the territory of the new Turkish Republic, noting the large numbers of Kurds and Turkmen, speakers of a language closely related to Turkish, who lived there. Turkey was also concerned that if the Mosul Kurds were not under its control, they would encourage Kurdish nationalist elements in Turkey itself.

The situation was tense and the British and international press both expected the two countries to go to war over the area, especially since an earlier League of Nations committee had ruled in favor of Turkish control. Turkish troops had been sent to the Brussels Line, the provisional border between Iraq and Turkey, and the British maintained a heavily armed presence there as well, particularly air power. Clashes between Turkish and British-led Arab units had occurred several times.

By the end of 1925, the League had ruled in favor of the British, making Mosul a part of the British Mandate over Iraq for the next 25 years. The Turks, who had fought a Kurdish insurgency in the region in February, were not in a position to take on Britain.

The status of Mosul was settled by the Treaty of Ankara in 1926, in which, in exchange for control over the city and its environs, the British gave the Turks 10 percent of the region's oil royalties and the right to engage in military activities in the region if it was destabilized.



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